

Potter II: The Curse of Slytherin

by Crazy Ivan

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Summary: A "Next Generation" fanfic (formerly "Hilary Potter and the Return to Hogwarts"), dealing with the aftermath of a rebellion by Slytherin at Hogwarts.

Potter II: The Curse of Slytherin

curseofslytherin

Author's note: This story deals with Hogwarts several decades into the future, with Harry, Hermione and Ron's generation's descendants entering their first year at Hogwarts. Slytherin House has been replaced by...well, that would be telling. The reader should note that the story was drafted prior to the release of "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire", in which it was shown that Severus Snape was on the side of Good. However, following well-set literary precedent, the author has decided to ignore this and continue merrily with the story.

>
 This story, incidentally, is rated PG-15. It contains some strong language.

>
 (The first draft of this story was entitled "Hilary Potter and the Return to Hogwarts". Since Falco has now become the main character, a title change was involved.)

>
 Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.

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 POTTER II: THE CURSE OF SLYTHERIN

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>
 The rebuilt castle on the tip of the headland gleamed in the early morning sunshine on a warm September day. Sparkling as the waves caught the light, the sea lapped against the rocks below as Virginia Potter gently tapped her sleeping daughter's shoulder, the girl's red hair shining in the light shining through the gap in the middle of her bedroom window curtains. She sprang out of bed.

> "Oh, Mum, it's today, isn't it?" Hilary Potter yelled happily.
 "Yes, it is, dear," Ginny Potter replied, smiling down at her daughter. "Your brother and sister are up already, and it's your turn in the shower. We're flooing down to King's Cross soon to catch the train. Buck up now!"

> Ginny stood and walked downstairs, giving her eldest son, Hagrid, a peck on the cheek, to a loud, exasperated "Oh, Mum!".
 Her elder daughter was rummaging around her room, muttering.
> "Minerva, dearest, what have you lost?" Ginny asked.
 "I can't find my hat!" Minerva Potter fumed. "I'm sure Hagrid's hidden it!"

> "Darling, we put it downstairs with the rest of your robes, remember?"
 "Oh. Yes." Minerva turned scarlet as Hagrid, the eldest, winked at her.

> "Come on, you lot," their father's voice came from downstairs. "We've got to get your trunks through the fireplace and down to Diagon Alley. And you'd better all have some breakfast before you go!"

> Hilary, emerging from the shower in a fluffy purple dressing-gown, grinned as she dressed quickly, throwing everything she'd need for the journey into a well-loved bag. Her brother and sister were already downstairs and munching on bacon sandwiches. She sat at the table and gulped down a glass of orange juice.
 "Now," Ginny Potter was saying, oblivious to her husband Harry's amused look. "You've all got your textbooks? You know how expensive they are nowadays. Wands? Robes? Hats?" The last word was delivered with a wink at Minerva, who blushed and frowned at her mother.

> "Ginny my dear, stop mothering them," Harry Potter said, chuckling. "We can send whatever they forget by owl. Hogwarts isn't that far away from here."
 "Harry, that's not the attitude. However true it may be..." Ginny trailed off as her husband gave her a bear-hug. "Goodness," she cried, spotting the clock on the wall which was pointing to 'You're Late'. "We're late!" She pointed her wand at the now-empty dishes, which flew at the sink, and focussed her attention on her three children.

> "Are we all ready?" she asked.
 "Yes, Mum," came three identical replies.

> "Is it always like this?" whispered Hilary to Minerva.
 "Always," the older girl replied. "You get used to it after a while."

>
 Minerva, tall and slim with straight red hair, was in her third year at Hogwarts, while Hagrid, her elder brother, stocky with curly hair, was a fourth-year. Minerva had been named for Professor Minerva McGonagall, previously Head of Gryffindor House at Hogwarts when their parents were students there. McGonagall had saved Harry Potter's life, as well as his friends', on more than one occasion.

>
 Hagrid Potter, on the other hand, had been named for the Gamekeeper at Hogwarts, Rubeus Hagrid, who had been the first person to tell Harry Potter that he was a wizard all those years ago. Throughout his seven years at Hogwarts, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron and Ginny Weasley had found Hagrid to be a loyal friend, always ready to step in and defend them -- whether from snide, sneering Draco Malfoy or from Lord Voldemort himself. He was also very fond of what he called "interesting creatures" -- what others would call "terrifying monsters", and Ginny Potter was amused to think that the son they named after Hagrid also showed a love of nature and of animals. Ever since he had stopped a Ravenous Bugblatter from snapping up the family owl at the age of four by dropping a large bowl of custard on it, young Hagrid had shown his parents that he could be trusted with all sorts of beast. His current menagerie contained two owls, a family of white mice, a baby iguana and a furry-nosed wombat, which, as he would excitedly tell anybody who would listen, had to be brushed four times a day and fed only eucalyptus leaves.

>
 Hilary was slightly worried at the thought of going off to Hogwarts, but the thought of her best friend, Tim Weasley, and his brothers and sister, Mike, Andrew and Elaine, cheered her up no end. Mikey and Elaine were the tricksters of that family, and their parents rather forlornly said that they took after their uncles, whom none of the children had never met. Hilary had been looking forward to going up to Hogwarts for as long as she could remember. Not only did her parents speak fondly of their time there, but, for six and a half years now, her older siblings had been raving about the place.

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 Ginny Weasley's bustling had finally managed to get her family ready and into the fireplace, each throwing a handful of Floo Powder in and saying, very clearly, "Diagon Alley". Hagrid had gone too far and had ended up in Espesch Alley, suspiciously near 'Brenda Burminda's Brilliant Beast Boutique' but had been quickly 'rescued' by his father before any more creatures could include themselves in his menagerie. As they exited the Leaky Cauldron to hail three taxicabs for all the luggage ("Harry, do you have enough Muggle money?"), Hilary spied Tim Weasley and his parents.

> "Tim! Over here!"

> Tim Weasley was a tall, gangling sort of boy, looking just like his father, as Mrs Potter would have said. Mr Ronald Weasley looked just like an older version of Tim, with exactly the same shade of bright red hair. Mr and Mrs Weasley followed, with Mikey, Andrew and Elaine Weasley following behind.

> "Tim!" shouted Hilary, bounding up to him. "Have you had a nice summer? Did you meet anyone going to Hogwarts?"
 "Actually," Tim said, rather glum, "Mum thought it would be educational for us to visit America."

> "Really? How super!" Hilary enthused.
 "Except that Mum kept losing herself in all sorts of museums, and Dad did almost nothing but talk to people from that American wizard school, what's it called..."

> "Oh dear," Hilary said.
 "Oh dear indeed," said Tim. "They made Drew take care of us. I've never worn so much sunscreen on a beach in my life. Soon as you're in the water, it's 'Come on, time for some more sunscreen' already. Honestly, Hilary, you'd think that we were about four, the way he mothers us around. AND he's a Gryffindor Prefect as well, this year. He'll be unstoppable."

>
 "Harry, how super to see you again," Mr Weasley was saying. "And hello to you too, Ginny. Got the children marshalled together, I see."

> "Don't mind your brother, Ginny," Hermione Weasley laughed. "He's just annoyed that he had to do it himself -- I was interviewing Professor McGonagall yesterday. I'd never realised how much work went into being Headmistress of Hogwarts. My goodness, the Editorship of the Daily Prophet is fairly easy compared with her job! I've been catching up on the back editions all the way to 1411, but even so, it's rather a lot to live up to!"

> Hermione Weasley had recently been appointed to be the Editor of the wizarding world's leading publication, the Daily Prophet. Her husband, Ron, however, worked at the Ministry of Magic, in the Magical Monitoring Department, making sure that no witch or wizard used magic improperly or in the view of Muggles. He was also Ginny Potter's older brother, and Harry Potter and Hermione Granger's best friend, and had been a year ahead of his sister at Hogwarts.

> They finally managed to find a small fleet of taxicabs to take them to King's Cross railway station, and found themselves standing in

front of the entrance to Platform 9 34. Hilary, Tim and Elaine, pushing trollies with their trunks on, walked quickly and purposefully towards the barrier and passed through without any problems, soon followed by the rest of their families.

>
 "All aboard," a large guard was shouting from the crimson engine, which was spouting a magical smoke with stars floating above it. "Empty compartments at the front! All aboard now!"

> The two mothers went into ultra-mothering mode and, kissing all their children (and each other's children as well), hustled them onto the train and into two separate compartments. Tim, Hilary and Elaine, who was in her second year at Hogwarts, sat down in a compartment with one lonely-looking boy with dark hair in it.
 "Hello," said Tim. "Mind if we sit here?"

> "No," said the boy, scaredly. "Want me to move?"
 "Don't be daft," said Hilary. "There's more than enough room for all of us."

> She held out her hand. "I'm Hilary. This is Tim, and that's Elaine. What's your name?"
 "I'm Falco," said the boy, smiling for the first time. "It's my first time going up to Hogwarts. I'm looking forward to it, but it is a bit frightening."

> Tim chuckled. "It's not that bad. All my family have been, and they say it's great. You see."

> Hilary had got her copy of "Hogwarts: A Revised History" out and was leafing through it. "Falco," she said, "I think you remind me of someone in this book."
 "Really?" Falco asked. "Which book's that?"

> Hilary showed him. "It's very good. Uncle-- I mean, Professor Sirius Black revised it last year and gave me a copy. Have your parents told you much about Hogwarts?"
 "No," said Falco. "I've not been taught much about wizardry. I was at an orphanage, and then sent off to school at seven."

> "Oh, I'm so sorry," Hilary said. "Were they wizards, your parents?"
 "Yes, I think so," said Falco. "The people at the orphanage said that my Head of House at Hogwarts would explain everything."

> "Well," said Hilary, "Let's all brush up on Hogwarts history for Falco's benefit."

> * * *

> "In the year after the Battle of Hogsmeade," the book said in its easy-going style, "an even greater battle was to break out. Professor Severus Snape, Head of Slytherin House, was to turn his back on all that Hogwarts held dear and betrayed the school. His attempt, backed by almost every member of his house, as well as some outside influence, was finally rebuffed by Albus Dumbledore, then-Headmaster of Hogwarts, who himself had help from members of the school and professors. Snape and his minions, however, had utilised much dark magic, and since that day, nobody has seen anything of Slytherin House...or of Professor Dumbledore. By a decree of the Minister of Magic, and since almost all traces of Slytherin House had disappeared from Hogwarts -- even to the extent of the Hogwarts Shield having a blank space where the Slytherin Serpent used to be, the Slytherin dungeon turning into solid wall, and all references to "Slytherin" within the school turning blank -- the fourth House of Hogwarts was named Dumbledore House, and its symbol became the Phoenix. Only two members of Slytherin House survived -- Draco Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson. Since they were soon to graduate anyway and had not been involved in the fiasco due to being in the hospital wing as a result of Quidditch injuries, they were allowed to remain at Hogwarts until Graduation. Malfoy's unfinished book, "Slytherin Remembered", was not published for many years due to his disappearance with Parkinson after the latter had borne him a son. Since the uprising, Hogwarts

has undergone a reshuffle of teaching staff several times. A complete list of teaching staff can always be found in the Daily Prophet newspaper on the fourth, fourteenth and twenty-fourth of each month and on the first of September. More information can be found in:

> 'Slytherin Remembered': Draco Malfoy, Knockturn Publishers (unfinished work)
 'The Hogwarts Attack': Patil & Patil, Flourish and Blotts

> 'Hogwarts Today': MacMillan and Finch-Fletchley, Flourish and Blotts
 'Dumbledore and the Defence of Hogwarts': Simon Binns, Espech Publishers."

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 "I'm sure that Malfoy had something to do with it," Tim said. "Mum and Dad always said that he was up to no good. They say the whole family's rotten to the core."

> Falco frowned at this but said nothing.
 "My parents said that he got what was coming to him, him and Snape," said Hilary.

> She was interrupted by a plump witch pushing a trolley. "Anything to eat or drink, dears?" she asked, smiling. "Iced pumpkin juice, pasties, sweets, chocolate?"
 The four of them crowded round her, each purchasing an armful of goodies.

> "Don't spoil your appetite," said Elaine. "The Hogwarts Sorting Feast is one of the best there. You'll not want to feel stuffed beforehand!"
 As they munched on Chocolate Frogs, Every-Flavour Beans and Pumpkin Pasties, they chatted about their future at Hogwarts.

> "I do hope I'm either in Dumbledore or Gryffindor," said Tim.
 "I don't mind which one I'm in, as long as we're in the same house," said Hilary. "Although I'd quite like to be in Gryffindor with Hagrid, Minerva, Mikey and Andrew."

> "And me?" asked Elaine, grinning.
 "Of course you, Elaine," said Tim. "How about you, Falco?"

> "I'm not really sure," said Falco. "I'd probably like to be in a house with you three. You've been so nice to me."
 "That's quite all right," said Tim. "I do hope we're all in the same house, it'll be so much fun. Elaine and Mikey say they'll lend me their Marauder's Map. I don't know what it is exactly, but it does sound exciting!"

>
 "The train is now approaching Hogwarts," boomed a magically amplified voice. "All students please prepare to disembark. Your luggage will be taken along separately."

> "Righto!" said Hilary. "We'll know soon enough. See you in the Sorting Ceremony, Elaine." Elaine jumped up and tore off through the train to ride up with Amelia Thundercloud, one of her friends in the second year.

> Hilary, Tim and Falco got off the train onto a small, dark platform. "Firs'-years! Over 'ere! 'Ello there, Falco! An' young Tim and Hilary too! Follow me! Any more firs'-years?" Hagrid stood at the end of a platform, surrounded by a group of boys and girls half his size. They peered down a narrow path which descended down a steep hillside and, being careful not to slip down the hill, they followed Hagrid down the hill. As they rounded a corner, they suddenly saw an enormous castle, its windows gleaming like fairy-lights in the dark sky, perched on a tall cliff above a glass-smooth lake. They reached the lakeside and Hagrid spoke again.

> "No more'n four to a boat!"
 A flotilla of small boats were bobbing in the water next to the shore. Hilary, Tim and Falco hopped into a boat and were joined by a blond-haired girl who introduced herself as Amy Kensington.

> "I'm SO happy to be here," she bubbled. "Ever since I got the

letter, I've been reading up on Hogwarts and everything! It's SO exciting!"
 Tim nudged Hilary and said, "She sounds like Dad keeps saying Mum used to be. Real bookworm!"

> The boats magically pushed off and headed for the castle.

> "Yes," Amy was saying, "It's a bit strange, coming from a Muggle background, and suddenly being able to forget about Biology and Simultaneous Equations and French Verbs. I can't imagine that I'll get bored with any of our magic lessons. The textbooks are all so much fun!"

> Amy was interrupted by Hagrid shouting "Heads down!" as they drew under a curtain of ivy, hiding a large opening in the cliffside. Along a dark tunnel they floated, emerging in a sort of subterranean harbour, where they all jumped out of the boats onto a rocky beach.
 "'Ope nobody's left anythin' in the boats," Hagrid said, loudly, and one boy ran back to get his small, grey kitten.

>
 The first-years all clambered up a smooth passageway winding its way inside the rock and came out onto a large expanse of grass, right below the front of the castle.

> "Righ', everyone up the stairs," Hagrid said. They ascended a long flight of steps and Hagrid knocked three times on the huge oak door.

> * * *

> The old door immediately swung open and a rather handsome, middle-aged wizard in deep purple robes with matching hat, smiled down at them. Hilary knew exactly who this was and gave him a wink. A slight raise of his eyebrow was all the wizard gave her to acknowledge it.
 "The firs'-years, Professor Black," said Hagrid.

> "Thanks, Hagrid. Ladies and Gentlemen, please follow me," Black said.
 He opened the other half of the door and the splendour of the Entrance Hall was revealed to all the students. It was huge, and lit by flaming torches. The ceiling was invisible, and it looked as though you could have fitted the entire Hogwarts Express from the floor to the ceiling. An enormous white marble staircase gleamed at them and led upwards.

>
 Professor Black ushered the students into a smaller room off the main hall, and they could all hear the muffled voices of the rest of the school through the stone walls. Black motioned for quiet and the first-years stopped talking immediately.

> "Allow me to welcome you to Hogwarts. I will momentarily be taking you into the start-of-term banquet, but before you take your seats on your house tables, you will need to be sorted into houses. The Sorting," he continued, "will be one of the most important moments of your Hogwarts career, because you will live and work with the members of your house and spend your free time in your house Common Room. You are sorted by the Sorting Hat, which is enchanted to select the best house for you.

> "Hogwarts has four houses, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and, new this year, Dumbledore. Each is named for a famous wizard and has its own story. This is the first year that Dumbledore House will be accepting students, so those of you who will be Sorted there will have a great responsibility. During your time here, your achievements will win your house points, while any, shall we say, misdeeds will lose them. The house with the most points at the end of the year wins the House Cup, which is one of the highest honours here."

> Black cleared his throat. "You will be Sorted in front of the whole school in a few moments. You might want to freshen yourselves up before the ceremony begins." He smiled at one boy whose hat had a strand of ivy curled round it and plucked the plant off. "I'll be back to bring you all in," he said, and walked out.

> A babble of nervous, excited voices sprang up, discussing the Sorting Ceremony.
 "I heard that it takes hours sometimes! You just sit there, and..."

> "No, it's done instantaneously..."
 "Sometimes, it doesn't answer, and then people are sent home..."

> Falco gulped and turned to Tim. "Do they really send you home?"
 "No," Tim smiled. "I heard one of my brothers spreading that rumour on the train."

>
 Before Falco could reply, a gasp came from one end of the room. Thirty-some ghosts had just floated through the side wall, heading towards the Great Hall. They hardly noticed the new students gaping at them.

> "Peeves, be quiet," said one of them, a rather rotund ghost.
 "Shan't!" shouted another, sticking out his tongue and blowing a raspberry at the first.

> "He's been unstoppable since the Bloody Baron disappeared," muttered a third ghost, who looked rather like a young girl.
 "Myrtle's right," said a fourth. "Thank goodness Rowena and Godric will be coming back soon. They're the only others who can deal with him!"

> The remainder of their conversation was unknown to the first-years as the ghosts passed through the other wall just before Black returned.

> "Right then, everyone," he said, "Please form a line and follow me." As the line of students followed him through the ornate doors into the Great Hall, some of them gasped with wonderment at the sight. Four huge tables were surrounded by hundreds of chattering students and thousands upon thousands of candles, floating above the tables, lightened the room so that it almost appeared to be daylight. Hilary grinned as she looked up to the enchanted ceiling, which exactly reflected the night sky above it. Black got all the first-years' attention by putting a four-legged stool in front of them and placing a rather worn, frayed and dusty wizard's hat. The hat began to sing its song:

> Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,
 But don't judge on what you see,
> I'll eat myself if you can find
 A smarter hat than me.
> You can keep your bowlers black,
 Your top hats sleek and tall,

> For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
 And I can cap them all.
> There's nothing hidden in your head
 The Sorting Hat can't see,

> So try me on and I will tell you
 Where you ought to be.
> You might belong in Gryffindor,
 Where dwell the brave at heart,

> Their daring, nerve and chivalry
 Set Gryffindors apart;
> You might belong in Hufflepuff,
 Where they are just and loyal,

> Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
 And unafraid of toil;
> Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
 If you've a ready mind,
> Where those of wit and learning,
 Will always find their kind;

> Or then again in Dumbledore,
 Where kindness and courage dwell;

> Eccentric and original,
 Those Dumbledores do well.
> So put me on! Don't be afraid!
 And don't get in a flap!
> You're in safe hands (though I have none)
 For I'm a Thinking Cap!

>
 As the hat finished its song (revised for the first and only time after Slytherin's disappearance) the entire school burst into

applause. Falco looked skywards, as if expecting the invisible roof to lift right off. Black stepped forward, facing the first-years and smiling as he held a long roll of parchment.

> "As I call your name, please step forward, put on the hat and sit down on the stool to be Sorted. Anderson, Felicia!"
Felicia Anderson stepped nervously forward, chewing her hair, and put the hat on.

> "RRRRRAVENCLAW!" yelled the hat, to a tumult of applause from the Ravenclaw table, towards which Felicia ran, grinning.
"Culloden, Hamish" stepped forwards and sat down on the stool.

> "DUMMMBLEDORE!" roared the hat, and the dark, curly-haired Culloden walked nervously towards the large, empty table.

> "Cyrus, Varikis" became a Hufflepuff, as did "DeMarco, Gemma".

"Frankly, Scarlet" became the first Gryffindor, while "Gordon, Bennett" and "Gurdle, Brace" were made Ravenclaws.
Amy Kensington hurried down and the hat almost immediately yelled "DUMMMBLEDORE!". She headed for Hamish and sat down next to him, giving his arm a squeeze.

> Black called "Malfoy, Falco," and the Great Hall fell completely silent. "Malfoy, Falco," Black repeated, kindly.

> Hilary and Tim stared at each other. Falco, the boy with whom they had made friends on the train, was the son of their fathers' mortal enemy? It couldn't have been...but it was. Hilary elbowed Tim and whispered, "That's who he reminded me of! Draco Malfoy!"

> Falco walked forwards to complete silence. He sat down stiffly and put on the hat. It seemed like an eternity, but it must only have been about thirty seconds, until the hat, oblivious to the silence, yelled "DUMMMBLEDORE!" The few first-years on the Dumbledore table applauded, and the rest of the hall followed halfheartedly. Hilary stole a glance at Falco, who looked as if he was trying very hard not to cry. She felt so sorry for him that Tim had to prod her to walk forwards after Black had called "Potter, Hilary". She sat down and her vision, like most of the other pupils', was obscured by the large hat.

> "Hmm," said a small voice. "Hilary Potter. Interesting. So like your father in so many ways...yet like your mother too. And there's something else... I think you'd better go in...DUMMMBLEDORE!"

Somewhat surprised, Hilary pulled the hat off and walked quickly down to the Dumbledore table, sitting next to Falco and giving his shoulder a squeeze. "Cheer up," she whispered. "I think you're all right!"
Falco smiled wanly at her. "Thanks," he mouthed.

> The hall returned to normal and soon it was "Tallis, Alexander", a Gryffindor, and then it was Tim. "DUMMMBLEDORE!" the hat yelled.

> Tim joined the others on the Dumbledore table and a rather old, stern-looking witch standing in the center of the High Table waved for quiet.
"Welcome to another year here at Hogwarts," she said.

"For the benefit of the new pupils, I am Professor Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts. Before we eat, we have one other matter of business. The Sorting Hat, as you will know, remembers everyone who passes under its brim. We at Hogwarts realise that older pupils are of course necessary to the smooth running of each house, and with the advent of Dumbledore House, which as yet contains no second- through seventh-year pupils, it is necessary to transfer some pupils from Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw to Dumbledore. The Sorting Hat, as I'm sure you'll all agree, is the fairest and best way to do this. Therefore, if the hat calls your name, please walk over and sit down at the Dumbledore table."

> The Hat sat on its stool and called out names quickly. The new Dumbledores walked across the hall to their new table, some stunned,

some happy, some thoughtful, and Hilary and Tim were pleased to note that their brothers and sisters were among the transferees. Andrew Weasley was looking worried and fingering his "Prefect" badge nervously, as if unsure whether he would be allowed to keep it, having transferred to a new house, while Mikey and Elaine looked elated, slapping the other Dumbledores on the back and guffawing. Hagrid Potter was surreptitiously holding his hand over a pocket, trying to keep a small bat inside his robes, while Minerva was patting all over her robe, trying to find something that she'd obviously misplaced. Pulling out the Remembrall, a small sphere that lit up a shocking magenta colour when you forgot something, she gulped as it changed colour to a violent pink.

>
 McGonagall clapped her hands and all the whispering stopped.

> "I also have the pleasure to announce that Professor Lupin will be the new Head of Dumbledore House. Professor Astoria takes over Ravenclaw, Professor Black remains in Gryffindor, and Professor Murtola stays in Hufflepuff. There will be no more announcements until after the banquet. Bon appetit!"
 McGonagall sat down and the dishes on each table magically filled with the most truly scrumptious foods. Roast beef, roast lamb, roast pork with oodles of scratching, roast turkey, roast chicken, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, mashed potatoes, five types of stuffing, chips, sausages, bacon and steaks, several different mustards, at least six kinds of gravy and, for some bizarre reason, mint humbugs. All the new Dumbledores gaped at it. Some of them, especially those from Muggle families, had never seen that much food, let alone have it appear right in front of their eyes.

>
 "Tuck in now!" someone yelled down the table, and everyone started to help themselves. Hilary, while helping Falco to one of the myriad stuffings, smiled at him.

> "Falco, why did you try to keep your name a secret?" she asked. Falco looked as if he were about to cry again.
 "Imagine if all you had ever heard about your father was how he had been caught up in some evil plot to attempt to take over Hogwarts, the bastion of wizardry. It's not pleasant. I've no memories at all of my father, and I have no feelings for him, or for Slytherin. I just want to be known as something other than 'Oh, it's Draco Malfoy's son! Better keep away, he'll enchant us!'"

>
 By this time, the whole table was listening to Falco.

> Hilary smiled. "Believe me, I know. I get the 'Oh, Harry Potter's daughter!' trick every time. I once started pronouncing my name as 'po-tay', as if it were French. Didn't work, though."
 "But your father wasn't one of the wizards who tried to take over Hogwarts," Falco said glumly.

> "No, he wasn't, but I can see what you're feeling. We're in rather different situations, but they are somewhat similar: you're trying not to live up to your father's legacy, but I'm trying desperately hard to live up to mine's reputation. The most powerful wizard in the modern era, or so we're told. For heaven's sake, there was even a movement to name the fourth house 'Potter' for a short while, until Dad asked them not to.

> "But for goodness' sake, Falco," Hilary continued, smiling. "I like you for who you are, not for who your father is or was, or even for who your father isn't or wasn't. I'll not allow anyone to choose my friends for me," she said, fiercely, "and neither, I think, will anyone else. If they do, you really don't want that sort of person for a friend, do you?"
 "I s'pose not," Falco said, cheering up and munching on a sausage.

>
 "Do you know Professor Lupin at all?" he asked.

> "Actually," Amy Kensington said from the other side of Hilary, "I read somewhere that Lupin is a vampire!"
 "No, he's a werewolf. Actually, he doesn't transform any more," said Tim. "His transformations were put into regression by my Mum right after she left school. The spell's still in the Restricted Section of the Library right here at Hogwarts."

> "Oh," said Amy. "I must have missed that bit."
 "I expect you did," said Hilary. "So, Amy, have you always known that you were a witch?"

> "No," said Amy. "My folks are both Muggles. When I was nine, I managed to make our car fly. Fortunately, it landed safely thanks to the help of a kind wizard who took me to be tested. When my parents found out that I had got a place here they were so thrilled. They've been learning almost as much as I have since I got the letter."
 "I expect you've been reading up on Hogwarts and its history, then," Hilary said, smiling. "Isn't it exciting?"

> She gestured to the amazing Great Hall, and a small blue candle floated past, its flame flickering as it moved to relight a small, dripping yellow candle which had been knocked over and put out by a rather sorry-looking roast potato which had come from the direction of Mikey Weasley.
 "I can't believe the ceiling," Amy said, peering up at the roof and not noticing that she had dipped her sleeve in the gravy. Since it was September, the sky was completely dark, lit only by the constellations above, which seemed to move as if waving at them. It seemed like Orion was grinning lustfully across the sky at Cassiopeia, until a warning glare from Sagittarius stopped him in his tracks.

>
 "Do any of you first-years play Quidditch?" asked a stout boy, who, until several minutes ago, had been a Ravenclaw.

> Several hands went up, including Hilary's, Tim's and a tall, blonde, nordic-looking girl whose name was Athena Skybreeze -- very apt, Tim thought. She looked as if she was used to racing across the sky.
 "Windfeather used to be one of Ravenclaw's Beaters," said a red-haired girl down the table from Falco, indicating the stout boy who had just spoken. "And I was Chaser for Ravenclaw last year, and Mikey Weasley was Beater for Gryffindor, and Hagrid Potter was Keeper for them. They've both lost a couple of good chaps there."

>
 "Yes," Athena Skybreeze was saying on the other side of the table. "I was a chaser in our local league. We live near the sea, and there's an uninhabited island a few miles out where we play."

> "I wonder who the Prefects are going to be," said someone else.

"And how are they going to work out House Points?"

> "Oh," a short boy with rather fluffy brown hair was saying, to a tall, somber-looking black-haired boy. "I'm Corton Bentine. But everyone calls me Corry."
 "Corry, did you play Quidditch at Bunions?" asked Hilary. "You look a bit familiar...I was Chaser at Toadworths, our schools used to play each other."

> "As a matter of fact, I did," Corry said. "You're Hilary Potter, aren't you? I thought I recognised you from somewhere. Everyone at Bunions was frightened of your Dad at matches, they thought that Voldemort or some Dementors were going to appear and attack us."
 Hilary flashed Falco a "see what I mean" sort of look.

> "I bet you're a really spiffing wizard, right? Bet your Mum and Dad have taught you all the first three years of lessons before you arrived," Corry said, a tad enviously. "My Dad's a Muggle, and Mum works at the Ministry of Magic on the Emergency Magical Response Force, so she couldn't teach me. You're ever so lucky, Hilary. And who's your friend over there? Hello, I'm Corton Bentine, but please call me Corry."
 "I'm Falco," Malfoy replied.

> "Don't you have a surname?" Corry asked.
 "Yes, it's Malfoy,"

Falco said, hiding his reluctance well.

> "Malfoy?" Corry said, shrinking back. "Oh, you're not a first-year, are you?"
Falco, thinking that Corry must either not pay attention very well or be very stupid indeed, smiled as Hilary squeezed his arm surreptitiously. "Actually, I am. I expect that we'll be in the same dorm. Won't that be fun?"

> "Erm, quite," Corry said, looking even more nervous. "And you must be Tim Weasley. You can tell from the red hair, y'know."
"Guilty as charged," Tim said, raising an eyebrow at Corry.

> "I bet your parents taught you things as well, what with your Mum being Editor of the Daily Prophet and all. It's quite unfair."

> "Corry," Hilary said, looking a trifle cross, "None of our parents have taught us any magic beyond simple housekeeping charms. We're underage witches and wizards too, remember? The Ministry prevents us from using any spell you need a wand for." She was getting rather red in the face.
"Please don't think that we get any special treatment just because our parents are famous. None of the teachers are going to care a jot, and we'll have just as much work to do as you. More even -- Falco, Tim and I have to live up to what our parents have done, so everybody has expectations -- I'm supposed to be just as great as my Dad, and Tim has to be just as clever and bookish as his Mum, and Falco...well, you understand about Falco. He's got it worst of any of us."

> Corton Bentine went quite red and mumbled something into his steak and chips. Hilary smiled and began to calm down. She, Tim and Falco, it appeared, had already found quite a bit of common ground.

> * * *

> When everyone their fill of pudding, the cakes, pies and sponges disappeared, and McGonagall stood again. "Just a few more announcements," she said.
"First-years should be aware that the Forbidden Forest is named so for a reason. And perhaps some of the second, third and fourth years could do with a reminder."

> Several people around the hall chuckled and elbowed their neighbours.
"Secondly, anyone interested in playing for their House Quidditch team should initially contact their House Quidditch Captain and then Madam Velose, who will be conducting trials this week. There will be a slight abnormality with the system of House Points this year. Since Dumbledore House has only 35 members, which is exactly half the other houses' numbers, their point values will be doubled. In the event of numbers changing, Professor Equatus of the Arithmancy Department will work out a percentage system. Additionally, Professor Lupin asks all members of Dumbledore to wait for him to lead them to the new Common Room. And finally, let us sing the School Song."

>
The students bellowed through the verses, each singing to a different tune, reading the words from the display which magically appeared in the air. One of the Dumbledore first-years was last to finish, her high soprano voice following a classical aria. The rest of the house applauded and cheered loudly. Remus walked down from the High Table and motioned for the new Dumbledore House to follow him. They followed a group of Gryffindors in the direction of Gryffindor Tower for a short while, but turned left when the Gryffindors turned right. They climbed a long flight of stairs and walked along a long corridor. A secret panel, a spiral staircase and a landing later, they were looking at a stately-looking picture of an old wizard who was smiling at them.

>
Lupin turned once they had almost reached the picture. "This is the entrance to Dumbledore House. The password is currently 'aardvark', but may change in the future. The guardian of our

entranceway is none other but the great Albus Dumbledore himself. Aardvark!" Lupin announced, and Dumbledore winked, said "Good evening to you too, Remus," and stepped aside, revealing a door behind him in the picture. "After you," said Lupin to the first-years, indicating that they should step THROUGH the picture. Hilary plucked up her courage and stepped forwards. She felt as if she were walking through the yellow barrier at King's Cross as she nearly fell forwards into a common room and stopped, staring. The rest of the first-years followed on and also stopped to gape at the sight of their common room. Some of them just stopped and stared, and had to be gently moved out of the way by the older pupils.

>
 Above them was a great transparent observation dome, stretching from one end of the room to the other. Rich, velvety fabric wall-hangings in deep purple hung to cover the stone supports for it and met in the center, where a large crystal chandelier hung, giving the dome the look of a purple octopus. All around the huge octagonal room were dotted comfortable chairs and sofas, some in purple, some in a deep turquoise green, some a warm, vibrant yellow, several a vivid sky blue, others a lava-like red and others still a cool, dark ultramarine blue. Sturdy, ancient-looking tables were surrounded by working chairs, and one of the walls was completely covered with a huge wide bookshelf, filled to the end with books, magazines, comics, wizard games and the sort of assorted thing that one finds on large bookshelves.

>
 "Amazing, isn't it?" Professor Lupin exclaimed happily. "This used to be the old Astronomy lab until the new tower was built. Each of the eight sides of Dumbledore Dome, apart from the bookshelf wall, has a door leading to two dormitories for each year, below the observatory but with equally splendid views from the windows. First-years, yours is over here, second-years next, then third-years..."

> Hilary, Amy, Tim, Falco and the other six Dumbledore first-years started for their door.
 "Just a moment," said Professor Lupin. "I'd just like to say that I'm immensely proud of all of you. I know some of you will miss your old houses, but don't forget that you're part of Dumbledore now. And, since we're small at the moment..." he smiled. "We can have more first-years on our Quidditch team. So study up on those moves and tactics, first-years. One last thing. I'd like to announce our two Prefects. They will be Scott Fairisle from the seventh year and Andrew Weasley from the sixth year. Please help them to do their job and don't even think about sneaking out of the Dome at night. Yes, Hagrid Potter and Frankie Drew, that means you. Our resident ghosts, Castor and Pollux, will be keeping an eye out. Right, off to bed with all of you but the Prefects. I'd like a word, Scott and Andrew."

>
 Falco Malfoy and Tim Weasley almost ran to the door with a large deep turquoise "1" on it, flinging it open and dashing down the stairs until they met a landing with two sets of stairs leading off it, one going up and one going down. "Girls to the right!" yelled Lupin down the stairs, and the two boys turned left and started to climb stairs again. They pulled open a door marked "Apollo Dorm" and stopped to gape again.

>
 The hexagonal room was decorated in much the same way as the Dome, but without the transparent ceiling. The wide, panoramic windows were framed by thick, plush curtains in the deep turquoise colour which seemed to be the other predominant colour of the House. The five boys found their trunks already at the foot of their beds, robes already unpacked and hanging in the wardrobes fitted into to the recesses of the walls. Each of the six walls but the one with the door to the stairs had a four-poster bed on it, each with a different

colour of curtains around it which matched the colour of the wardrobe doors. Falco was pleased to notice that Tim was in the vibrant yellow bed next to his own ultramarine blue. He smiled at a rather short boy with short, dark, curly hair in tartan pyjamas on the other side of him in the orange bed.

>
 "Hello, I'm Falco," he said.

> "Hamish Culloden," the gentle Scots accent replied. "How d'ye do?"
 The Scottish boy proceeded to take a small, docile owl from a cage and proceeded to hang the cage from a hook near the window. "Falco, I'd like you to meet Tartan. He's my owl, a present from my Gran for my birthday." The 'r's rolled off Hamish's tongue and Falco couldn't help warming to the chap.

> "Ye're Draco Malfoy's son, right?" Hamish asked.
 "Yes," Falco said, his heart sinking. He ran a hand through his dark hair and waited for the inevitable gasp of horror.

> "Hmm," Hamish said. "That must be really tough. D'ye get much stick for it?"
 Falco's jaw almost hit the floor. "You have no idea," he said, sitting on the end of Hamish's bed.

> "Ye're right. I dinnae know how ye manage it," he said, sitting next to Falco. "Ye've done well t'have the courage to come to Hogwarts, ye know. In your situation, I dinnae think I could've done it." He started to brush Tartan with a soft white comb, making his plumage stand out straight and then flattening it down again.

> Falco walked over to his bed and pulled his new snow-white kitten out of her travelling box, returned to Hamish's bed and placed the tiny ball of fur on the mattress.
 "This is Snowy, Hamish. She's only just left her mother. Cats are so much fun at this age...except she does tend to sleep a lot."

> Corry wandered over from the sky blue bed. "Oh, I see you've got a cat too," he remarked. "Mine's arriving tomorrow, I rather forgot him in all the rush. Hope he doesn't eat yours or anything, he's rather large."
 Falco frowned at this. He had become rather attached to Snowy since he had picked her up in Diagon Alley.

>
 Having introduced themselves, the five boys proceeded to lay out the remaining, rather squashed, food which they had purchased on the train on the low round table in the middle of the room. Hamish muttered darkly that he was bound to walk into it in the night, which everyone but he and Corry, who was in much the same predicament, thought was hilarious.

>
 * * *

>
 Meanwhile, the first-year girls in Artemis dormitory were trying to work out a small problem. Cordelia Eglamour, a rather snooty-looking witch, was having difficulty fitting her sixth set of "mufti" robes, which she could use at weekends, into her yellow wardrobe.

> "I don't think they let you wear mufti on weekends," Desdemona Duncan, a short, black-haired girl, said as she put her three black robes and one shorter, dark blue robe into her orange wardrobe. Everybody called her "Desie" -- she disliked "Desdemona" and frowned at anybody who called her by the long form of her name. Whenever one of her parents or a teacher used it, she would give them a scowl and fold her arms, shaking her black hair like a horse's mane. Hilary had immediately liked the girl for her practical, no-nonsense attitude. She could tell that Desie wouldn't put up with any nonsense.

> "Perhaps they'll let me keep my trunk under my bed," fretted Cordelia.
 "Oh, for goodness' sake, Cordelia," Desie said exasperatedly. "You don't NEED six sets of weekend robes. In case you hadn't noticed, we're in the Scottish Highlands. The nearest city is Glasgow, which is almost ALL Muggle. Hogwarts isn't exactly the hip,

happening place to come for fashion. Put them in your trunk and lock it in the trunk room. "

> Cordelia sniffed and pushed a rather shocking, lowcut magenta robe further into the wardrobe.
 Hilary and Amy had found the other three girls rather nice, even if Cordelia was a bit dippy. Somebody knocked on the door, and the magenta robe fell out of the wardrobe, covering Cordelia, who thrashed about, looking almost like a violently pink ghost.

>
 "Girls?" It was a female voice. "May I come in?"

> A short, redhaired girl, who looked as if she was in her sixth or seventh year at the school, poked her head round the door just in time to see Cordelia still struggling with the vivid magenta robe. She walked in and perched on the table in the center of the room.

 "I'm Cathy Asbach, and I'm the Senior Girl here in Dumbledore. Not quite a Prefect, but they're both boys this year, and so can't come in here for obvious reasons," she chuckled. "Actually, I'm the only girl above the fifth year in Gry--Dumbledore, I mean. Anyway, I just wanted to check you were all happy and settling in properly."

>
 Hilary was about to say "Yes, thanks," but Cordelia Eglamour, underneath her shocking pink robe, got there first.

> "Can I keep my trunk under my bed?" asked Cordelia.
 "Umm...I don't think so," said Cathy. "Why?"

> "My wardrobe is too small," came the reply from under the magenta fabric.
 "I see," said Cathy. "Do you know any Expanding Charms?"

> "Any WHAT?" a muffled Cordelia asked.
 "Expanding charms. Very useful for the lady on the go. Allow me, Miss...?"

> "Eglamour, Cordelia Eglamour."
 "Very well then, Cordy." Cathy took out her wand. "Expandi voluminus," she said, waving her wand at the back of the wardrobe. It appeared to widen on the inside, going taller and deeper as well, but the outside dimensions stayed the same when Cathy closed the door to admire her handiwork.

> "Wow, I must learn that one for my room at home!" said Amy excitedly.
 "It doesn't work on anything much larger than a closet," said Cathy. "You need an enchantment rather than a charm for that, and that would break Ministry rules. Believe me, I've tried. It doesn't work: they make you return it to normal."

>
 The five girls chatted to Cathy for a few minutes and then hopped into bed, drawing the curtains around them. The thick material, Hilary thought, would definitely keep the cold out in winter. She smiled as she lay back into the plump down pillows, drawing the sumptuous duvet over her pyjamas. She could tell that she was going to love Hogwarts as much as her parents had done. She went to sleep thinking of Falco Malfoy, and how cute he looked with those two locks of hair slipping down over his eyes.

>
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>
 The following morning all ten of the first-years bounded upstairs into the common room.

> "Those beds are SO comfortable!" said Corry, yawning and adjusting his robe.
 Falco Malfoy was brushing white cat hair off his black robes. Snowy had obviously been rubbing herself up against the robes all night, and had got fur everywhere. He grinned at Hilary and Amy and stretched widely.

>
 They wandered downstairs, managing to remember most of the way, and arrived in the Great Hall a bit before the rest of Dumbledore and the other houses entered. A sumptuous breakfast followed: sausages, bacon, fried bread, porridge, toast, grilled mushrooms, black pudding, eggs cooked at least seven different ways and every type of cereal imaginable. Over breakfast they chatted with

some of the older students about lessons. One rather dippy-looking fifth-year girl thought that Divination with Professor Oreille was the most interesting, but Elaine Weasley snorted into her porridge and muttered something about pure luck.

>
 Oberon Windfeather, the Dumbledore Quidditch Captain, was talking to some of the first-years about Quidditch, and when Corry Bentine mentioned that he had played Seeker for East Northern Juniors, Windfeather's eyes lit up like torches. "Really? We'll have to get a Seeker from the first year anyway, nobody in the upper years has ever played. But if you're familiar with the position..." he trailed off, and they all knew that, in his imagination, he was holding the Quidditch Cup.

>
 Several fourth- and third-year girls were talking about their dormitories. "Athena's lovely and big," said one. At this, Athena Skybreeze looked up.

> "Somebody call me?" she asked, bemused.
 They all giggled. "Oh, is your name Athena? Well, you know how all the dorms are named after mythological gods and goddesses? Ours is Athena! That's so cool!"

> Athena raised an eyebrow, grinning. "I can just tell this is going to be a recurring joke," she said. "Anyway, Minerva Potter's probably in much the same shoes. We have the same name, except mine's the Greek version and hers's the Roman."
 Minerva frowned good-naturedly and flicked an orange pip at Athena.

>
 The four Marys in the fifth year were explaining to Cordelia Eglamour that no, they hadn't known each other before arriving, and that yes, it was strange that the Sorting Hat had put them all in Dumbledore from Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. Cordelia frowned as one of them referred to her as "Cordy" -- that Asbach girl had made the silly nickname stick. "I think it's rather nice," Desie Duncan had said. "Unless you'd prefer Delia?" Cordelia had to admit that Cordy did sound better. At least this way, nobody compared her with some Muggle chef or other, but she really DID prefer to be called by her proper name. "Cordy" just sounded SO common!

>
 After breakfast, they all returned to the octagonal common room, swathed in purple and green, which everyone was calling the Dumbledome. Some of the older members of the house were playing wizard chess and an amusing table version of Quidditch, using coins instead of balls, and played with a silver Sickle and several bronze Knuts. The aim was to use the Sickle to knock the Knuts through a designated area at each end of the table. Whoever knocked the most Knuts off won. Hagrid Potter, amid muffled angry squeaks from a mouse in his left pocket, was doing rather well against Elaine Weasley, who was terribly afraid of mice and kept flinching every time the mouse squeaked. Unfortunately, this was usually just as she was lining up a rather good shot at the scoring zone, and so she lost quite badly to Hagrid.

>
 Professor Lupin entered just as Hagrid had performed a rather good shot, which resulted in a Knut flying wildly off the table and knocking Lupin's hat rather askew. Trying very hard to keep from smiling, he closed one eye and raised the other eyebrow at Hagrid.

>
 "Ahem," he said, giving in to a smile. "Not quite the refined, mature entrance I was hoping for. In any case, I have timetables for everybody here. First-years first, please," he said, smiling warmly at them.

>
 All the first-years had the same lessons -- Herbology with Professor Chou, who introduced them to the magical powers of turnips, one of the most powerful substances in the magical world; Transfiguration with Professor Black, where they tried desperately to turn a bronze Knut into a bottletop (Amy Kensington unfortunately succeeded in turning hers into quite an attractive hair clip, which

Cordelia Eglamour rather fancied); Potions with the rather batty Professor Mirvoli, where their Laughing Elixir was reasonably successful in lightening the mood of the afternoon (except for Amy Kensington, who managed to swallow rather too much and had to take a quiet rest in Professor Mirvoli's office for thirty minutes); and finally, their most boring lesson: History of Magic, with their only ghost teacher, Professor Binns. Even Amy Kensington, usually interested in everything, gained a glazed look ten minutes into the lesson.

>
 "All right," she said, as she walked out with Tim, Falco and Hilary. "Some magic classes CAN be boring. That Professor Tinns..."

> "Binns," they chorused, rolling their eyes at each other.

> They were outside after lunch, learning how to fly a broomstick alongside the Hufflepuffs. Madam Velose was instructing them carefully on how to hold the handle, and they all mounted their broomsticks. "Now carefully," she said, "and gently pull up on the front of the stick and slowly push off with your feet."

> Cordelia Eglamour pushed off a trifle too hard and slipped off the end of her broom onto the grass. Frowning at the stick and trying to wipe the grass off her immaculately-ironed and brushed robe, she sat back on the broomstick and tried again. By this time, Corry Bentine had lifted up about thirty feet into the air and was happily sitting on his broomstick yelling advice to a disgruntled-looking Hufflepuff. Cordelia and the Hufflepuff pulled up on their broomsticks at almost exactly the same moment, bumping into each other and clinging on for dear life. Unfortunately, Cordelia leaned back too far and the broomstick shot upwards, narrowly missing Corry Bentine, who very nearly fell off with shock. Madam Velose shot up after Cordelia, who was now only the size of a large bee from the viewpoint of the students still on the ground. Fortunately, however, Madam Velose was riding a brand new speedy Nimbus XP, while Cordelia and all the other pupils were starting on the old Firebolts. She pulled Cordelia off the Firebolt and shouted, "Hold on, girl!"

> The Nimbus, not made to carry two people, began to sink worryingly and Cordelia began to shriek quietly on the back. Madam Velose brought the broomstick round in large, sweeping circles, slowing the descent by circling and using the air's resistance to brake them. Corry Bentine and Athena Skybreeze were the only ones still in the air and moved closer to try and help. Madam Velose, gripping the Firebolt with her legs, with Cordelia still holding on for dear life, grabbed hold of the two Firebolts and managed to slow her descent enough so that nobody broke anything on landing. Cordelia, still clinging upside down onto the Nimbus, had to be gently prised off by Desie Duncan and Amy Kensington and walked quietly and slowly up to Sister Lennol in the hospital wing, Amy gabbling happily about how she'd read a book which said that broomsticks were quite easy to control really.

> The lesson continued, with everyone more than a little nervous, but quite a few of the students made excellent progress, including Falco Malfoy, who, although he had never flown a broomstick before, seemed to be a natural, working the old Firebolt as if it were Madam Velose's Nimbus. Corry Bentine and Athena Skybreeze remarked on his flying, and said that they might be out of a place on the Quidditch team if he kept it up. Falco beamed at this high praise from the best flyers in the year, and spirits all around were noticeably improved, apart from Cordelia, who swore to Amy and Desie that she would never, EVER, get on "one of those suicidal contraptions" again.

> As night fell that evening, eight of the ten Dumbledore first-years were sitting in the common room in the large, comfortable chairs and

sofas. Tim Weasley, from a short, round chair, sipped at a mug of hot chocolate and smiled. "I can't believe our first day here's almost over! It seems only a minute ago we arrived..."
 "Tell me about it," said Corry. "Although Cordy going haywire on a broomstick did provide some light relief."

> "That's not funny," said Desie. "You didn't have to listen to her whinging about it afterwards!"
 "You'd have whinged too, if you'd almost been killed by a broomstick," Hilary said, frowning disapprovingly. "It's not Cordelia's fault that she doesn't know how to fly a broomstick. She's still crying on Amy's shoulder in the dorm, poor thing!"

> "Oh, please!" said Athena Skybreeze, flinging her long blond hair back. "She's a stuck-up prig. Got what was coming to her, if you ask me."
 "Dinnae judge the poor girl," said Hamish. "She's just got to work on her technique, that's all."

> "Tell me," Desie Duncan said privately to Athena. "Does Amy strike you as a bit batty at all?"
 "Well," Athena said, thinking, "For someone who does so much reading, she gets remarkably confused between facts. She told me that, to rid a room of pixies, you used 'Obliviate'. The consequences could have been...interesting, to say the least."

> "Hmm," Desie said. "I mean, she's not a bad egg and all..."
 The boys chuckled, having overheard them.

> "What?" asked Desie, exasperatedly.
 "Oh, nothing," said Tim, still smiling.

>
 Corry yawned, setting off a spate among the rest of his year. Scott Fairisle, their Prefect, spied it.

> "Tired, firsties?" he called across the room.
 "No," said Hilary.

> "Well, it's time you should all be in dorms anyway. Off you go. G'night." Fairisle went back to reading his book as the first-years went through the door and corridors into their dorms, glaring at Corry.

> "What've we got first thing tomorrow?" Hamish asked as he flung his robes over the end of his bed and changed into pyjamas.
 "I think," Falco said, yawning, "It's double Charms."

> He slipped under the dark blue duvet and pulled the curtains around his bed. Snowy the kitten clambered up over his shoulder and nestled next to his ear, purring loudly. "Night," he mumbled to the small white bundle of fur.
 "Mrrrrr-rrr," it responded.

>
 * * *

>
 The next week passed extremely quickly, at least until Quidditch training started. Oberon Windfeather, who everyone called Obe, had got the prospective Quidditch squad up at seven one cold autumn morning and was talking them through the selection process.

> "Now, last season, Ravenclaw lost because our -- THEIR, rather -- Seeker was knocked out before the second match, and they never recovered from the loss. We're going to have backup positions for everyone, so we'll be training in two teams today. All clear?"
 Obe chose the teams and the fourteen Dumbledores lifted off on their brooms, the two Seekers patrolling high above the rest of the teams.

>
 One of the Chasers snatched a Quaffle and sped towards the opposing Keeper who blocked her shot, throwing the Quaffle to one of his Chasers, who caught it clumsily, almost falling off her broomstick. Recovering, she was hit from the other side by a well-aimed Bludger from Mikey Weasley, who grabbed the Quaffle and threw it to first team Chaser Athena Skybreeze, who scored easily past the Keeper.

> "Ten-nil!" roared Windfeather. "Keep going!"

> The game went back and forth, each side scoring alternately for a while, until Corry spied the Golden Snitch hovering by one of the goal hoops and snatched it up. The game ended and the two halves of the training squad landed. "Good game, seconds," Windfeather was saying as Falco landed, having only been a second or so behind Bentine in spying the Snitch.
 "Oh, it was nothing, really," said Corry off-handedly. "You know, just got to keep your eyes moving and not linger in one place too long. With the experience that I've got as Seeker..."
>
 Several of the boys, including Falco, rolled their eyes at this and tuned Corry's monologue out. They quickly showered and arrived in small groups in the Common Room, to stare open-mouthed at a notice hanging from the door.
>
 "Students may not leave the Castle without teacher supervision. A very dangerous Manticore is believed to be loose in the Forest, and should not be approached under any circumstances. Any pupil found outside the castle without a member of staff will lose one hundred points for their house and will win a triple detention. So don't."
>
 Prof. M. McGonagall
> Headmistress"

> "A MANTICORE!" Amy Kensington, who had just arrived from her dorm, said excitedly. "One look from its eyes and you're dead!"
 "No, Kensington, that's a Basilisk," said a seventh-year. "And the Potters' father killed it thirty-odd years ago."
> Hilary, Hagrid and Minerva blushed and looked away at the mention of their father.
 "Oh," said Amy, who was trying desperately hard. "Desie, remind me to brush up on 'Mythical Creatures: Fact or Fiction' today."
> "Manticores," Desie said, reinforcing her thoughts that Amy was scatterbrained, "have the head of a man with horns, the body of a lion and the tail of a scorpion or dragon, depending whether they're Common or Exotic Manticores. They're very nasty and shouldn't be approached by anyone below a Master of Spells, Second Class." She sighed, knowing that Amy would likely forget it soon enough.
 "Oh," said Amy. "I suppose you'd use a 'Peskipiksi' charm on them, would you?"
>
 "You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss Kensington," said Scott Fairisle, before Desie or anybody else could tell her that 'Peskipiksi' was, unsurprisingly, for dealing with Pixie infestations.
>
 Fairisle continued. "Not only will you lose the House about two hundred points, but you'll likely be killed. If I hear so much as a whisper that you've been outside..."
> "Scott, TWO hundred?" said Mary Carmichael, puzzled. "But the notice says--"
 "Remember in the banquet McGonagall said that our point wins or losses were doubled since we're smaller?" Fairisle said pointedly. "Don't ANY of you listen to a word anyone says around here?"
>
 "Scott, calm down," said Cathy. "I'm SURE Amy wouldn't try to deal with a Manticore." All the same, she gave Kensington a warning look as if to say, "Don't even think about it".
> Hilary wasn't convinced that Amy would leave the subject, and it was a rather quieter-than-normal group of Dumbledores who walked out of the Dumbledome down to the Great Hall.

> Quidditch practice was, unfortunately, cancelled for the next few weeks, just in case the Manticore appeared and tried to eat the players, which might have been very unfortunate. All the matches were put forward to later dates, and the Great Doors of Hogwarts wouldn't

let any of the students out into the grounds without a member of staff. Hagrid the gamekeeper was almost never inside, and his large, hulking shadow was often seen from the windows, roaming around in the grounds and the Forbidden Forest with Professor Black, whose first-through fourth-year Transfiguration lessons were taken by Cathy Asbach, who was particularly good at Transfiguration. By the time McGonagall announced that the Manticore had been captured and shipped off to Wales a week later, the Dumbledores and Ravenclaws (who had been sharing lessons) had learned to change a candle into a tall leafy pot-plant. At least, all but Amy Kensington, who had managed to change the candle into a particularly unattractive and annoyed-looking Gnome.

> "Well, Catharine," Black had said when he returned to teach the Dumbledores. "I'm very impressed, and only one person turned their candle into a Gnome. Thirty points to Dumbledore and my sincere thanks for keeping the class in human form."

> In the Dumbledome the following Friday mid-morning break, they all cheered when Lupin announced that Cathy's SIXTY points had put them in the lead for the House Cup. "Now, nobody go spoil it," Cathy said, grinning. In fact, this put them all in such a good mood that Mikey and Elaine Weasley immediately snuck out to Hogsmeade and brought back a keg of Butterbeer for the House. When Fairisle the Prefect asked suspiciously where it had come from, they said, "Won it in a competition in Wand and Robe Magazine a while ago. Today seemed like the perfect day to break it open!" As the house enjoyed the warm, buttery drink, Mikey and Elaine Weasley were plotting an expedition with some of the first-years, who all liked the friendly, mischievous siblings with their bright orange hair.

> "Now that we can get out of school without being shot," Elaine said, "We can go take a look at what's in that greenhouse with the Invisibility Charm around it."
 "What greenhouse?" Corry Bentine asked, puzzled.

> "Well," said Mikey, "It wouldn't be invisible if you could see it, would it?"
 They all chuckled.

> "Well, how do you know it's there?" said Tim, confused.
 "I threw some soil over the place where the old greenhouse used to be," said Mikey, grinning. "It bounced right off. There's got to be something hidden there."

> "What if there's something dangerous there?" asked Corry, not sure about this at all. "I mean REALLY dangerous? Like a man-eating plant or something."
 "Well then," said Hilary, grinning at Elaine, "A man-eating plant won't eat a woman. You gentlemen can be chivalrous. And the man-eating plant's lunch."

> Corry frowned and looked worried.

> * * *

> In the dead of a dark October night, seven dark forms crept stealthily down the stairs and out onto the lawn, keeping in the pitch-black at the foot of the castle. They skimmed across the lawn one at a time, and stood behind one of the greenhouses. Hilary jumped as a large bat skimmed close overhead.
 "Are we all here?" whispered Mikey.

> "I think so," said Elaine. "Us two...Hilary, Tim, Falco and Corry. Six."
 "Right, stay here," said Mikey. He started to move over towards the greenhouse but froze and dropped to the ground. The other six followed suit as the door of the greenhouse opened and Professor Chou walked out, bathed in light from the inside of the greenhouse. She turned, muttered "Disapparatus", and the greenhouse door disappeared. Satisfied, she started to walk back to the castle, humming a jaunty tune.

>
 As soon as she was out of earshot, Elaine crept up to Mikey.

"She doesn't sound overly worried about whatever's in there," she said.

> "No need to fear then," Mikey said. He walked over, followed by the other six students, and said quietly, "Apparatus." This was the opposite spell from the Invisibility Charm used by Professor Chou, and the door swung open. Immediately, a huge red tentacle slammed out of the greenhouse and struck Corton Bentine on the side of the head. He dropped like a stone with a stomach-wrenching flop onto the ground, his eyes closed.
 "DISAPPARATUS!" six voices whispered in shock. The door slammed shut again and the tentacle withdrew just in time. The six conscious pupils stared at Bentine with their hearts in their throats.

>
 "What are we going to do?" asked Athena, looking worried.

> "Damage limitation," said Elaine briskly. "Mikey, Falco, Hilary, get back inside the castle NOW. Tim and I will take Corry to Sister Lennol, because we're not in the Quidditch team tomorrow. And you," she continued, looking at the Quidditch players, "were never here."

> Falco started to protest, to say that he wasn't in the team either, but with Corry down for the count, he realised that he had just become the Dumbledores' only Seeker. Along with Mikey and Hilary, he hurried back towards the castle, entering through one of the doors at the base of Gryffindor Tower. They made their way back through a secret passageway Mikey had found up to Dumbledore House and scurried back into their dorms. Falco stealthily but very quickly changed and sat in his bed behind his curtains, breathing heavily, wondering what would happen to Corry -- and to Tim and Elaine. He heard footsteps and the door opening, but instead of pulling the curtains to see who it was, lay slowly back and closed his eyes, placing his hand over Snowy's quietly snoring stomach.

> It was lucky that he had, because Scott Fairisle and Andrew Weasley pulled the curtains open and stared at him seemingly peacefully asleep with his cat. "Not him," whispered one of them, and they let the curtains close again. His heart racing, Falco listened carefully and heard footsteps again -- whoever it was was nearly at the door. His heart nearly stopped. It must have been Tim returning from the hospital wing -- but the two Prefects were still in the room! They were bound to catch Tim out of bed and find out what they had all been doing!

> An idea about how to rescue the situation flashed into Falco's mind, along with visions of himself as a hero, but he would have to act quickly to distract the Prefects from Tim's approach. Moving Snowy over, he gave a loud, piercing shriek, sat up straight and flung his curtains open, yelling "LUMINOS MAJOR!" The room lit up very brightly indeed, and, jumping off his bed and stumbling purposefully into the table, he knocked two owl cages off it with a resounding clang. By this time, the two Prefects had jumped nearly out of their skins and were leaning jumpily against the wall. Falco's falsely sleepy gaze turned towards Tim -- but he wasn't there. Instead, Professor Remus Lupin stood, arms folded, regarding them quizzically from underneath a rather fetching dressing gown in the purple and deep turquoise of Dumbledore House.

> "Well, I never!" he said, rolling his eyes. "What on EARTH is going on here?"
 "Sorry, sir!" Falco said painedly, rubbing his leg as if it were really injured. "I had a terrible nightmare about Manticores and Basilisks. And--oh!" he stopped, as if seeing the two Prefects for the first time. "What're you..."

> He thought his acting was rather good, especially since Hamish Culloden and Adrian Kevance were now peeking confusedly out from between the curtains at the feet of their beds.
 "That, Falco,"

Lupin said, "is exactly what I should like to know. Scott? Andrew?"

> "Sir," began Fairisle, "Weasley's out of his bed!"
 "I can see that, Scott. In case you haven't noticed, he's standing next to you!" Lupin laughed.

> "No sir, not me, Tim. He's not here, and neither is Bentine!" said Drew Weasley.

> "What?" Lupin's head jerked back to the yellow bed with curtains still drawn. He pulled them open to reveal bedclothes purposefully messed to look like they had been slept in. His smiling demeanor disappeared and his face darkened as if he realised that whatever prank the boys were playing was now quickly heading downhill. "Falco, do you know where they are?"
 "No, sir," Falco replied truthfully. He DIDN'T know exactly where they were, after all.

>
 Lupin's face gained a look of true concern. "Scott, Andrew, with me. The rest of you, back to bed, please." Lupin strode off, the two Prefects hurrying to catch up. Falco, shrugging at Culloden and Kevance, sat down on the edge of his bed.

>
 "What on earth?" they asked after a very long silence.

> "Really bad nightmare," Falco said, indicating his hand. "That's when I woke up and found the two Prefects here."
 "Why were they here? And where's Weasley?" asked Hamish.

> "I think that was Professor Lupin's question," replied Falco. "And I'm afraid can't answer it for you."

> They were interrupted by a knocking on the door. "Can we come in?" came several female voices.
 "Sure," said Falco after pulling on a long dressing gown. The five girls burst in, all talking at once. Hilary shot a knowing look at Falco while rabbiting on as if they were none the wiser to the situation.

> "Cathy Asbach came down to see if we knew where Elaine Weasley was," said Cordelia Eglamour, her eyes shining with fear and apprehension. "She said that she was just taking Elaine's mouse, which she found in her room, back to her, but she wasn't there, Elaine I mean, and so SHE told Scott Fairisle and Andrew Weasley (an adoringly glazed look came over Cordelia's face at the mention of first name), and they were in here, and Corry and Tim aren't, and Professor Lupin was, and--" She had to sit on the table, flustered.

> "Breathe, Cordy," Desie said acidically, for which Hilary elbowed her.
 "It's dreadful! Where are all these people? Do you think there's another Mantilisk? Or a Basicore?" Amy said, unwittingly covering up Hilary elbowing Desie.

> "Manticore or Basilisk, you mean, Amy," said Desie Duncan, more exasperatedly than usual.
 "Oh," said Amy, not really taking any notice. "But Manticores have snakes for hair! And their eyes can turn you to stone!" said Amy Kensington excitedly.

> "No, Amy," several people chorused. "That's a Gorgon. Manticores have--"

> Before any of them could speak further, Scott Fairisle poked his head round the door. "What's going on here?" he fumed.
 "Oh, Scott, we were just so worried!" simpered Cordelia, and Desie had to be restrained from making puking motions. "What if it's that dreadful monster again?"

> "Understandable," said Fairisle dashingly. "But nothing to worry about. House meeting for all of you, in the dome, right now. Everything's sorted out."
 They followed him out of the dorm, along the stairs and into the dome, where Professors Black and Lupin were waiting with a rather cowed-looking Elaine and Tim Weasley. Elaine had taken off her glasses and was nervously fingering them and patting her bushy red hair.

>
 "Elaine! Tim!" Cordelia squealed. "You're safe! Thank goodness!"

> Desie couldn't refrain any longer. She poked Cordelia hard in the ribs from behind. "Airhead! Corry's still not here!"
 "Miss Duncan," Black murmured. "Calm down."

> "Sorry, sir," Desie said, deathstaring Cordelia, who missed the look completely.
 Cathy Asbach and Drew Weasley strode in, followed by the rest of the house. They all sat down in chairs or perched on the arms. Only a few of them had any inkling of what was coming.

>
 "Ladies and Gentlemen," Lupin began, for once not smiling. "I have some rather bad news. Following a late-night prank, Corton Bentine was attacked by a Vermicious Carnopod in a greenhouse." Gasps of horror came from around the room. "Fortunately," Lupin continued, "it was only a juvenile, and Sister Lennol assures me he will make a full recovery in time. However," he said, sounding unusually threatening, "Professor Chou informs me that there were ALSO two fully-grown adults in the same greenhouse, which could easily have killed Corry -- or either of the two very foolish people who were with him. Fifty points each will be deducted from Dumbledore for his two co-conspirators. I think he himself won't need any more persuading not to repeat his actions. Let me just say that I'm VERY disappointed in the House tonight, very disappointed indeed."

> He looked them all over.
 "Now, back to bed with you all. The Quidditch game is tomorrow. I hope you restore my trust in you then. Goodnight."

>
 The two Professors turned and walked out of the dome and through the mural, leaving the stunned students alone.

> "That's TWO HUNDRED points, once you double them!" gasped Mary Hamilton. "We'll lose the House Cup for certain!"
 "BED!" thundered Scott Fairisle, face as black as thunder. "Detention for anyone still in this room in ten seconds!"

> In the scramble to get out, neither Tim nor Elaine had a chance to speak with anyone not in their dorm. By the time they got back to the dormitory, Fairisle was waiting for them. "If I hear so much as a PEEP out of this room all night, you'll all be in detention all MONTH," fumed Fairisle. "Now go to sleep, and NO TALKING!"

> The four boys all climbed silently into bed, pulling the curtains. "Extinctus Luminos Ad Matinus," the Prefect said, and closed the door loudly.

> Falco thought of speaking to Tim, but was sure that Scott had left an Amplification charm in the room. Turning over, he tried to force himself to go to sleep.

> * * *

> As they walked down the corridor, Professor Sirius Black turned to Professor Remus Lupin and smiled.
 "Excellent show, Remus," he said. "I saw Amy Kensington looking quite distraught."

> "High praise, Sirius," Lupin said, smiling. "But really, our pranks were so much more successful and less dangerous than theirs..."
 Black guffawed. "Like becoming unauthorised animagi and hiding out with a werewolf, Moony?"

> "I suppose," said Lupin, grinning. "Now, let's go put the fear of death in young Mr Bentine's eyes, Padfoot. And I still maintain that one of the Weasleys have the Map!"

> Many years ago, when they had been friends at Hogwarts, Black and Lupin had helped to make the Marauder's Map, an enchanted piece of parchment which gave a complete diagram of the castle, showing the movements of every person in it as well as all the secret passageways. Later on, Lupin had given the Map to Harry Potter, and its current whereabouts was unknown, but Black reckoned that Harry

still had it, and Lupin thought that one of the Weasley family had it, most likely Elaine or Mikey. They seemed to be the most likely.

> * * *

> The next morning, Falco woke very early, so early that it was still dark outside. He padded up the stairs in his dressing-gown and sat in the common room, thinking and watching the sun gradually come up over the Hogwarts lake. About five minutes after the sun's rays had illuminated the lake, forest, fields and hills, Athena Skybreeze entered the Dumbledome and, yawning and stretching, she sat down next to him.
 "Worried?" she asked.

> "No, not really," Falco said, unconvincingly.
 "Don't worry about the match. Just do your best. That was the first piece of advice that anyone gave me when playing Quidditch, and it's still the best." She pulled her long blonde hair back, braiding it into a long, single braid going down her back. "So, Falco, where are you from?"

>
 "Well," Falco began, not sure where to start, "As you have probably realised, I'm Draco Malfoy's son. I've never met either of my parents and grew up in a wizarding orphanage. I apparently have the family fortune, but I can't have any of it until I'm 18. There's a lawyer somewhere who's keeping track of it all. Anyway, I went off to school when I reached seven years old and I didn't leave. I never went back to the orphanage...and have no intention of doing so. I hope they let me stay here over the summer; it's so much better than that place."

> "That's so awful," Athena sympathised. It was the first time that Falco had not heard her using her acerbic tongue. "I never realised how lucky I am to still have both parents, or to live at home. My father's Wizard Ambassador to Denmark, and has been for the last ten years, so I don't remember much else. Of course, we spoke English at home, but at school until I was seven, I spoke Danish. Then I went to school here in Britain, and quickly caught up. When you're seven, you do try to fit in, after all."
 "I know exactly what you mean," Falco said.

>
 Their discussion was interrupted by Mikey Weasley arriving in the room.

> "Morning, you two," he said. "Up early, aren't you? Don't forget to eat a decent breakfast. Don't want you falling off your brooms with hunger."
 "Thank you, O God of Common Sense," said Athena, back to her old sarcastic self. "How we have benefited from your wisdom. How can we ever thank you?"

> "Oh, several million galleons in my Gringotts vault, the usual, m'dear," Mikey replied.
 "Touche," Athena said, having met her match.

>
 The rest of the Quidditch team arrived soon after and made their way through the corridors, Albus Dumbledore wishing them well in their game from his picture. He was being visited by his old friend, Nicolas Flamel, who bowed politely to the Dumbledores as they passed.

>
 They ate a rather hurried breakfast in the Great Hall, where a beautiful day was dawning. The sky the previous night had been red, and Amy Kensington had said "Red sky at night, you'll have a fright." Unsurprisingly, she had got the rhyme wrong and the day was indeed a delight. The bright early morning sunshine streamed in through the windows and enchanted ceiling, and they could hear the birds singing a symphony of music as if welcoming the sun back to earth.

>
 The Gryffindor team entered ten minutes or so after the Dumbledores and sat down, looking almost as nervous as they did.

> "Right," Windfeather was saying, ripping a paper napkin to shreds

as he occupied his hands, "We'll need some luck today. Beaters, we've got to keep those Bludgers away from the Chasers -- and from Falco. Chasers, score as many goals as you can. And Falco...well, you've just GOT to find the Snitch before the others do. Are we all ready?" he asked, the first pep talk over.
 "Yes," they chorused somewhat feebly.

> "What?" he asked, cupping his hand to his ear. "Did I hear something?"
 "YES!" they all shouted, making a Gryffindor spill a jug of milk all over their table.

>
 The Dumbledores emerged onto the pitch a short while later, resplendent in deep turquoise-trimmed purple robes, gleaming in the sunshine. They marched in a line, as a display of confidence, but inside they were all dreading the match, Falco not least. What if he didn't see the Snitch? Or fell off his broomstick? Or committed a foul? Or--

>
 "And it's a luvverly day here at Hogwarts for the first Quidditch match of the season," Cathy Asbach was saying into a magically-amplified microphone, Professor Black sitting next to her. "And here's Dumbledore house, looking quite the part in their very groovy robes. This is a very young team, with a full three members in the first year. This is a Hogwarts record, folks, we've never had so many firsties in a Quidditch team. First in the lineup are the three Chasers, Hilary Potter and Athena Skybreeze, first-years, and Zara McLeod, third-year. They're followed by their two Beaters, Mikey Weasley, fifth-year and Vice-Captain, and Oberon Windfeather, fourth-year and Captain. Bringing up the rear is their Keeper, Hagrid Potter, a sixth-year, and young Falco Malfoy, who is only their reserve Seeker following an incident last night involving a--"

> "Ahem," Sirius Black said goodnaturedly to Cathy. "I don't think we want to go there, Miss Asbach."
 "Of course we don't, Professor. Oh, and here come the Gryffindors in their red robes. Not quite as flashy as the Dumbledores--"

> "Cathy..." Black grinned. "If you're going to be biased, you should be biased in FAVOUR of my house."
 "Yes--I mean, no, Professor," Cathy said, grinning.

>
 As the Gryffindors strode onto the pitch, Cathy recited a description much like the one she had given the Dumbledores. Madam Velose, clad in white and black horizontally striped robes which made her look like a zebra on a broom, hovered leisurely into the middle of the field. "Mount your brooms!" she boomed.

"Three...two...one...GO!"

>
 Zara McLeod, a Dumbledore Chaser, swooped down and snatched the Quaffle. Passing it back and forth with Hilary Potter, Dumbledore House scored a quick ten points.

> "Ten-nil!" Cathy announced excitedly.
 A very small Gryffindor Chaser snatched the ball and, fast as lightning, shot towards the goal. Hagrid Potter, although he nearly obscured two of the goals, wasn't fast enough for the Chaser, who scored Gryffindor's first ten points.

> "Ten all!" boomed Cathy.

> Above the field, Falco darted around, frantically looking for the Snitch. He thought he saw a glint of gold, but he had to dive to evade a Bludger and it was gone.
 "Thirty-twenty!" he heard from Cathy, and redoubled his searching. The two teams seemed to be quite evenly-matched, so in this match, it was going to come down to the very end -- whichever house captured the Golden Snitch would win. He pulled his broomstick up again and resumed his hunt.

>
 Things were not going quite as easily for Hilary Potter and Athena Skybreeze. The Gryffindor Beaters were unerring in their accuracy and, despite valiant efforts from Mikey and Oberon, the

Dumbledore Chasers had to perform steep turns several times to evade the Bludgers, losing possession of the Quaffle as a result.

> "Eighty-one hundred," Cathy said sadly.
 Athena grabbed the Quaffle and, passing it to Hilary, sped up the field. Hilary passed the Quaffle to Zara narrowly before she was thumped in the side by a Bludger and had to slow down to regain her orientation. Zara scored, bringing the score to ninety to one hundred, and a cheer went up from the ranks of Dumbledore supporters in the stands below.

>
 Falco, peering down at the game below, spied a small, round flash of gold zipping across the pitch. He pulled his broomstick into a steep dive and leaned as far forward as he could. Hurtling towards the Snitch, his peripheral vision didn't catch the Bludgers heading for him. One struck him a glancing blow to the side of the temple and his head reeled. He shook his head, trying to rid his vision of the small shiny visions flying around his head in circles. He frowned as two of them refused to go away and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. When he reopened them, only one was left. He started to close his eyes again and then the realisation hit him. It WASN'T a result of being stunned by the Bludger attack. It was the Snitch! His eyes snapped open and he grabbed for it. His fingers brushed the tiny wings but slipped off. He blazed after it, headache and disorientation forgotten, and concentrated on squeezing the most speed out of the broom. Onward it sped like lightning, past the stands where the crowd gasped at him, reaching further and further, until, almost at the other end of the pitch, he felt his fingers clench around the golden beating wings.

>
 With a triumphant yell, he brought the broomstick up in a steep climb, one hand raised above his head in victory. The rest of the team shouted in response, mobbing him with hugs of congratulations. Professor Black smiled and shook Cathy's hand in a good-natured show of sportsmanship, and Professor Lupin was jumping up and down, hugging Hagrid the gamekeeper and the large Rhinowort he had with him. A small sea of purple and turquoise robes burst the banks of the stands and started dancing around on the grass below the pitch, yelling even louder when the team returned to the ground. The seven members of the winning team were carried on shoulders all the way to the entrance to the changing rooms, where they quickly showered and changed.

>
 The scene that evening in the Dumbledome was chaotic. Most of the long tables had all been pulled together to make a huge U-shaped banquet table. Purple and turquoise streamers were draped over everything, and a large phoenix banner was attached to the entire length of the bookshelf wall.

>
 The Hogwarts kitchens, thanks to a rather large favour called in by Professor Lupin, had excelled themselves. Huge tureens of punch tinted in the very same vivid purple colour as the furnishings were magically floating around the room, and each tasted of a different fruit: passionfruit, papaya, strawberry, grape, blackcurrant and some that nobody could place but were most delicious.

>
 Trays of mini sausages, pizzas, quiche, sausage rolls, pork pies, little pastry-filled things and several others which nobody recognised (and thus which almost nobody would even think of tasting) floated past in silver serving dishes after everyone had drunk several glasses of punch. Cordelia Eglamour decided that she would try one of the random thingies on a tray. Unfortunately, it was so disgusting that she spat it out almost immediately and made retching noises until Desie Duncan, rolling her eyes, passed her a glass of punch and sat her down in a large chair.

>
 Games of table Quidditch were being played on all the tables which were not being used for the banquet. Bronze Knuts and Silver

Sickles were flying across the room, somehow managing to miss anybody's vital organs on their way. Small groups of people had moved off to start conversations. In a corner, Professor Lupin was chatting to Hilary, Tim and Falco.

>
 "Yes," he was saying in between mouthfuls of a scrumptious looking pastry with haggis filling, "I did teach your father, Tim. And a right troublemaker he was as well!"

> "Weren't you at school here with my grandfather as well?" asked Hilary, curious to hear anything about him.
 "Yes, actually," said Lupin. "But don't ask me too much about it. Professor McGonagall would be shocked to find out what we all got up to." Sirius Black wouldn't, Lupin inwardly laughed. After all, Black had been one of the ringleaders of their little gang.

> "Sir," asked Falco, "Did you know my father too?"
 Lupin cocked his head to one side and looked thoughtful for a moment. "Yes, I did, Falco," he replied, taking a deep breath. "I'll not lie to you, he was a rather unpleasant character, usually trying to get anybody he could into trouble."

> "Did Slytherin House really try to destroy the school when he was here?" Falco blurted out without thinking.
 "Well, I wasn't here," said Lupin unconvincingly. "I didn't see any of it first-hand."

> Falco's eyes flashed and Lupin, who had been intending to leave the explanation at that, decided to continue, leaning forwards intensely and touching the fingertips of his hands together thoughtfully.

> "All right, Falco. Before I start, I should emphasise that your own father wasn't actually involved in any of this -- and was cleared from any wrongdoing by the Ministry -- he and Pansy Parkinson were ill in the hospital ward. Some potion or other hadn't worked correctly and they was sleeping it off under Madam Pomfrey's care. Even more important, all of this is second-hand from me. I wasn't teaching here at the time because Hermione hadn't put me into regression yet. Anyway, the story starts with a so-called colleague of mine, Professor Severus Snape. He and I went back a long way -- to our days as boys here at Hogwarts. Snape and I didn't get on. In fact, we loathed each other. He was one of the most unpleasant people you could ever want to meet. In any case, he was, by the time all this happened, Head of Slytherin House, and the occupants, according to certain other people here at the time, were no more pleasant than he."

> Hilary, Falco and Tim leaned forward, captivated.

> "Anyway," Lupin continued, "Nobody really knows how or why Snape and Slytherin actually started to plan this revolt of his. It was in Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger's final year, and things had steadily been going downhill for Slytherin for quite a while indeed. Gryffindor had won the House Cup for six years running, had taken the Quidditch Cup for four, and Slytherin had been relegated to fourth place in the House Cup the previous year due to a certain indiscretion by Draco Malfoy."

> Falco's face turned bright red, but he continued to listen attentively.

> "The facts of the actual attack were quite clear, however," Lupin said, realising that the Common Room was starting to empty of students. "Snape and the Slytherins managed, through some fairly strong dark magic, to bring a larger-than-life corporeal version of Salazar Slytherin into Hogwarts, hiding him in the Chamber of Secrets far beneath the castle. Harry and Hermione realised that something was in the Chamber, and, for once, I might add, went straight to the Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. Dumbledore, as we all know from History of Magic--" Lupin stopped and smiled at them. "--or from Chocolate

Frog Cards, was possibly the most powerful wizard of his time, so powerful that even Lord Voldemort wouldn't face him. So, Dumbledore, along with Professor McGonagall, broke open the Chamber and was very surprised to find Snape and all but the aforementioned two members of Slytherin House in the Chamber preparing an extremely powerful Dark Magic Enchantment, which would have removed all non-Slytherins from Hogwarts, essentially turning Hogwarts into a School of Dark Magic.

> "A pitched battle ensued, primarily between Dumbledore and McGonagall and Slytherin and Snape. Slytherin seemed to be gaining the upper hand and Snape was about to wipe Professor McGonagall's mind with a Memory Charm when, having been alerted by Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley burst in, followed by Fawkes. Hermione had been studying Advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts, and knew the precise spell to banish Slytherin back to ghost state and beyond. She, Harry and Ron linked their powers together using an Aggregation spell and cast the spell on Slytherin.

> "According to the accounts later given to the Ministry of Magic by all three of them, the spell wrapped Slytherin up in a kind of tornado. He was engulfed, but not completely banished -- perhaps due to the large number of wizards who had summoned him. Fortunately, this gave Dumbledore the opening he needed, and, growing to about three times his normal size, he hurled himself into the tornado around Slytherin. Ron and Hermione were knocked unconscious by the explosion of magical power that resulted, but, from Harry's semi-conscious account, all the Slytherins, including Snape, disappeared and the tornado imploded with a huge rush of air. The Chamber began to collapse and water started pouring into it from the lake, so McGonagall and Harry carried Ron and Hermione up and out of it before it collapsed."

> The three pupils in the Dumbledome sat hanging on every word, their minds imagining the scene. Lupin took a deep breath, noticed that the Common Room was completely empty and continued. "Several very powerful wizards later tried to excavate the Chamber over quite a few summer holidays, but they found that the opening was completely blocked and that nothing they could do would clear it. The entrance, which used to be a girls' bathroom, was filled with a strong enchantment, the entrance bricked up and covered and it's now just a normal length of wall."

> "But what about Professor Dumbledore?" asked Falco.
 "Well," Lupin said, taking a sip from his glass of punch, "Nobody ever saw Dumbledore or Fawkes again. But what's really interesting," he said conspiratorially, "is that Dumbledore's office and rooms were completely packed up. Nothing of his was left apart from the furniture. Nobody knows where it went or, even more, HOW it went. Some people suggest that Dumbledore knew he was going to die, some think he's not really dead, others say that, when he was destroyed, all of his worldly possessions vanished. But what's certain is that he, along with McGonagall and Harry, Hermione and Ron, saved Hogwarts. He was posthumously awarded the Grand Star of Merlin and given a posthumous seat in the House of Wizards. McGonagall, Potter, Granger and Weasley were given an Order of Merlin, First Class, and neither Severus Snape nor Slytherin House were ever seen again. School was broken up early that summer, and over the holiday McGonagall and quite a few others tried to get into Slytherin House, and this is the most interesting part indeed. Slytherin House...had DISAPPEARED. Not just the pupils, you understand, but the actual House. Where the entrance to their dungeon Common Room used to be was just a blank wall, completely devoid of anything behind it. Harry

tried to blast through it but only found wall. Perhaps it disappeared like Albus Dumbledore, perhaps it's still there but hidden. Needless to say, the entrance to the dungeons was enchanted, and Warding Charms were placed all over the whole area. It's perfectly safe, but quite spooky. You should get Hagrid to take you down there sometime."

>
 Lupin yawned. "And now, I must head off for bed. I have quite a few essays to mark tomorrow, so you'll excuse me for leaving your very good company. Don't be too long out of bed yourselves, either."

>
 He smiled, stood and walked out of the Common Room, past the Dumbledore painting and down to his own rooms. Hilary, Tim and Falco looked at each other and breathed heavily. "What a story!" Tim said excitedly.

> "I know!" Hilary enthused. "I wonder what did happen to Dumbledore! Dad never mentioned anything like this happening...did your parents, Tim?"
 "Nope," said Tim. "I expect Dumbledore just died. Don't make things more mysterious than they already are."

> "It's interesting that Professor Lupin didn't mention my father or his book in the story, though," said Falco. "I read it quite a while ago, and it says much the same thing, except without the detail in the Chamber itself, since he wasn't there. He claims that both he and my mother weren't responsible for their part in the planning of the revolt on the grounds that Snape had enchanted them with a powerful Compulsion Enchantment. The Ministry believed him and there it lay. He and my mother were never married, and disappeared when I was very young indeed. I have no idea where they went or why." He shrugged. "Tim, did your mother really cure Lupin?"
 "I think so," Tim said. "I heard her talking to Dad about it. Apparently, she put a very difficult special sort of Warding Enchantment on him which filters out the light of the moon and stops its effects completely, so he goes into a kind of regression. As long as he isn't exposed to certain types of Disenchantments, he'll be absolutely fine. And she wrote the process down for him so that anyone could cast it if it did come off. It's worked, apparently. He hasn't changed in about ten years."

>
 Falco yawned and his eyes started to close. "Come on, sleepyhead," Tim said. "We'll catch it if Scott Fairisle finds us down here asleep in the morning. Off to bed."

>
 Three very sleepy first-years were late for their first Herbology lesson the next morning, to the consternation of Professor Chou, whose French accent showed through especially strongly when she was cross.

> "Why are you late? Zees is very bad. I will have to report zis to Professeur Lupin. Take your places immediatement, s'il vous plait!"
 Hilary, Tim and Falco hurried to their customary workbench to find three rather disgusting-looking dead Polyworms lying next to scalpels and other cutting implements.

> "Today," Professor Chou continued, "Ve are going to be dissecting Polyworms. Take ze scalpel..."

> * * *

> Feeling distinctly worse and glad that they hadn't had any breakfast to throw up (unlike Cordelia Eglamour and Corton Bentine), a queasy Falco and Hilary made their way to Potions early, since Professor Chou had let everyone out early. Tim had forgotten his Potions book, so he'd run back to Dumbledore to get it and asked them to tell Professor Mirvoli why he would be late. As they rounded the corner to the Potions corridor, however, something pushed Tim being late for Potions to the back of their minds.

> Professor Mirvoli lay sprawled in the middle of the corridor, a

large beaker of a vile-smelling cloudy blue liquid smashed on the floor next to him. A sort of grey fog hung at head height all along the corridor and Hilary and Falco had to duck to avoid being engulfed in it.
 "Professor Mirvoli!" Hilary yelled. "Professor!"
 > She started towards him but Falco pulled her back. "No! Remember the Hogwarts safety rules? 'Rule 32B. In case of a magic-induced emergency, students must not approach the magic, but instead should shout "Emergency" as loud as possible.'
 Hilary looked at Falco and they both simultaneously shrieked "EMERGENCY!" at the top of their lungs.
 >
 A magical charm amplified their voices throughout the entire building and they could hear it echoing down far corridors. An amplified voice returned. "All students must leave the Castle immediately. Please assemble on the Front Lawn in House groups. Repeat..."
 > "We should stay," said Falco, as running footsteps signified someone approaching. Hilary pulled her wand out and aimed it at the footsteps coming around the corner.
 > Professors Black and Lupin rounded the corner and skidded to a halt when they saw Hilary's wand pointing at them. "Hilary, put that down," commanded Black in a rather fierce voice. Hilary lowered her wand and stepped back so that they could see Mirvoli lying in the corridor. Lupin drew his wand and, muttering, waved the smoke away from the corridor. As he and Black bent over the unconscious Professor, Falco gasped.
 "Look!" he said urgently, pointing down the corridor.
 > A large hole had been blown out of the outside wall, and it appeared that somebody had been too desperate to leave to use the door. Black looked up and raised his wand. "Remus," he said quietly, "Guess who."
 > Lupin stood and raised his eyebrows. "Ah," he said under his breath. He waved his wand, muttered something quietly and commanded "Minerva McGonagall!"
 A great puff of wind blew down the corridor and Professor McGonagall stood where Lupin had waved his wand. "What in blazes?" she asked before falling silent at the sight of the hole in the wall. "Oh my..."
 > "What?" Falco asked. All three Professors whirled, as if surprised to see them there.
 "What did you see, Malfoy? It is imperative that you tell us everything," said McGonagall.
 > "We just came round the corner a bit early for Potions and saw the Professor here. We raised the alarm, and that's all," said Falco. "We didn't see it happen."
 "Right, get out of this castle immediately. Remus, if you'd care to..." she indicated Falco and Hilary.
 > "Certainly," Lupin said and pulled his wand out. "Front Lawn," he said clearly before waving the wand over them. There was a puff of green smoke around them and they eventually saw...exactly the same sight. Lupin, McGonagall and Black had turned back to Mirvoli.
 "Er, Professor," said Hilary. "It doesn't seem to have worked."
 >
 Nobody turned around, so Falco said "Professor? PROFESSOR!", but still none of them moved, still murmuring over Mirvoli. Hilary moved forwards and tapped McGonagall's shoulder and the Headmistress almost jumped out of her skin. She whirled and aimed her wand at Hilary. "Identificus!" she shouted and a red flame came out of the end of her wand, passing straight through Hilary and bouncing off the far wall. She stared straight at them -- and past them. As if she couldn't see them, she looked around wildly and saw Black and Lupin staring at her.
 > "Something tapped me on the shoulder," she said.
 "We'd best get Donatello out of here as soon as possible," said Black, indicating

Mirvoli.

> "Tylenne Lennol," said McGonagall, waving her wand in a similar way to Lupin. Sister Lennol appeared suddenly and gasped as she saw Mirvoli.
 "Donatello! What happened here?" she asked.

> "No idea," said Black. "Students found him, and Minerva just got tapped by an invisible person who didn't appear to an 'Identificus'. Can we move Donatello?"

> "I should think so," Sister Lennol said. "Wingardium Leviosa!"
 Mirvoli lifted a foot above the ground, blue liquid dripping off the end of his robe. Meanwhile, Hilary and Falco had been shouting for the past few minutes, to no avail. They could hear each other, but none of the Professors could hear them. As the Professors moved off, the two students followed.

>
 "What are we going to do?" Hilary asked Falco, voice hoarse from all the shouting she had been doing.

> "Search me," Falco replied, shrugging. "Although I'd bet we're being missed out on the Front Lawn as we speak."

> * * *

> Indeed they were, as their fellow Dumbledores were beginning to get a trifle frantic in their search.
 "I'm sure they're just lagging behind," Amy Kensington was saying reassuringly to nobody in particular.

> "Shut up, Amy," Desie Duncan said as Athena Skybreeze clambered onto her shoulders for a better view.
 "Fairisle!" Athena yelled, waving at their Prefect, who strode over, frowning.

> "Athena, get down from there!" Scott Fairisle thundered. "What on earth--"
 "Hilary and Falco are missing," Desie said loudly, breaking in and stopping Fairisle in mid-sentence.

> "Oh, shit," Fairisle said, before realising that he'd just sworn in front of his first year. "Bollocks...DREW! CATHY!" he yelled, and Andrew Weasley and Cathy Asbach hurried over. "We have a situation," he said. "Hilary Potter and Falco Malfoy are not here. Drew, fetch a professor. Cathy, see if they're with any of the other houses."

> The three senior Dumbledores scattered, Drew fetching Professor Velose, the Games teacher, who was looking particularly concerned about the lack of the Heads of House -- since Professors Black of Gryffindor, Lupin of Dumbledore and Mirtoli of Hufflepuff were still inside the castle -- not to mention the absent Professor McGonagall.
 "Lost, you say?" Professor Velose said, frowning severely.

"Well, when they're found, they'll have some answering to do! And where is Professor Lupin? How irresponsible..."

>
 Hilary and Falco, rather out of breath, chose that moment to arrive, and shouted to the concerned-looking Dumbledores, who acted as if they hadn't heard a thing.

> "Let's try an Amplification Charm," Hilary said, tapping her wand to her throat. "Vociferus! CAN ANYONE HEAR ME? HELLO?

HELLLLLLLOOOOOO?!"
 She looked despairingly at Falco. "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?"

> Falco cringed. "Could you turn the volume down, Hil?"
 "SORRY," Hilary whispered at a roar, tapping her throat and mouthing "QUIETUS."

> "Well, that didn't work. Let me try air-writing," Falco said, drawing his wand and writing in the air in large shimmering green script:
 "Hello? Can anyone see this? This is Falco Malfoy and Hilary Potter. Hello?"

> Hilary and Falco watched hopefully as several people walked straight through the lettering without seeing it, dissolving the words.
 "Well," Falco said, "that's that. Since we can obviously touch things, we'll just have to wait until we can get back to the

castle and write on a board."

> "Hang on," Hilary said. "How about taking someone else's wand and trying to use it?"
 "Okay...but I thought someone else's wand never worked properly if you tried to use it," Falco said nervously.

> "I reckon that's a myth put out by parents and professors. Come on, I'll grab Cordy's -- it's sticking right out."

> Hilary walked purposefully (if invisibly) towards Cordelia Eglamour, who was looking very worried indeed, as if this wasn't the sort of thing a girl of her stature should have to be worrying about. Hilary darted forwards and pulled Cordelia's wand out of her pocket, making her jump and shriek with fright.

> "Something's got my WAND!" Cordelia shrieked, grasping hold of Athena Skybreeze, who looked almost as frightened herself. Students started to scatter away from Falco and Hilary, shouting in surprise and terror as the wand waggled about in thin air.

> "Quick!" Falco said urgently. "Start writing!"
 Hilary muttered the spell, but didn't know what went wrong as the wand started shooting orange-red sparks out of the end in every direction, singeing students left and right and increasing the terror on the lawn. Several older students, including Scott Fairisle, Oberon Windfeather and Cathy Asbach, stepped forwards, yelling "Finite incantatem!" at the top of their lungs, wand outstretched. The wand was flung out of Hilary's grasp, flying towards a huddle of twenty or thirty Hufflepuffs, who screamed as they were pelted with red-hot sparks. Professor Velose, in an attempt to regain control of the situation, waved her own wand at Cordelia's sparking one, sending it in an altogether different direction, revolving towards a large group of Ravenclaws, who followed the Hufflepuffs' example of running as fast as possible towards the safety of the lake. As Professor Equatus tried to stop the wand hitting a clump of Gryffindors, it flew back towards the Dumbledores. Corry Bentine tripped over Hamish Culloden's robes as he tried to get away, ending up entwined with Hamish and Tim Weasley in a human knot. Meanwhile, Desie Duncan had only just managed to calm Cordy Eglamour down when Amy Kensington shrieked and ran into them both, knocking them all down and taking several Dumbledore second-years with them.

>
 Hilary and Falco, shocked at the chaos they had created, could only watch as the wand was flung among random groups of students until it finally came to rest in a patch of unoccupied grass and sputtered out. One by one, the terrified students who had covered their heads with their robes peeked up cautiously. Without really thinking, Falco walked over and tried to give Corry Bentine a hand to get up. Corry, however, feeling the touch of an invisible hand on his arm, yelled louder than the whistle on the Hogwarts Express, trampling Hamish and Tim in his frantic attempts to get away. Falco, realising his mistake, backed quickly away and into Amy Kensington, who went flying back into Cordy, Desie and Athena. Falco extricated himself with help from Hilary, who had started to giggle at the scene which was unfolding.

>
 * * *

>
 That's it so far. If you'd like to be updated whenever this fic is updated, you can select "AuthorAlert" for me, Crazy Ivan, under your fanfiction.net preferences. If you enjoyed this fic, you'd probably love my latest effort, Harry Potter and the Song of Time, as well as:

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 Draco Dormiens and Draco Sinister by Cassandra Claire

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 You might also be interested in the eGroup mailing list
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>

> And remember: A Reviewing Day Is A Happy Day.

End
file.